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From: Jeff Jonas (jeffj@panix.com)

Search Result 4

Subject: Re: Overcharging and inaccurate store pricing, Was: Re: K-Mart & Wal-Mart

shoppers: watch your check-out receipts

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Date: 1997/01/06

>In article <5anvig\$143@basement.replay.com>,
 >>especially when buying "sale" items. you may be surprised.
 >>it's always a good idea to check receipts
 ...

In article <1997Jan6.012102.21773@cs.rochester.edu> jag@cs.rochester.edu
 (Martin Jagersand) writes:

>This issue touches a nerve in me. I wonder how many people regularly
 >check their receipts, and how often people bother to **complain** about
 >deceptive or outright cheating with shelf prices. I have a fairly
 >good memory, and try to remember shelf prices for items and check
 >what I actually paid.

I try to be diligent and have sometimes gone back to check the
 shelf tags. Sometimes I didn't remember correctly.
 Other times I take the sign/tag to to the "customer service"
 counter and **complain** (usually to no avail).
 Supermarkets are the most difficult where only ONE particular
 product and size and style will be on sale but it's not clearly marked
 or the shelves are already a mess (such as chunk lite tuna in oil
 vs solid tuna or tuna in water ...).

I agree that K-mart messes up big time.
 They had a clearance shelf from which I took several items.
 NONE of them rang up correctly.
 Had I not **complained** immediately the cashier would just have
 let me pay the wrong price and go home.
 The cashier had no power of make corrections, so I had to wait
 for the manager to come over and un-do the wrong prices
 and manually enter the correct **discount**.
 I find it hard to believe that for every item from that clearance area
 the manager has to enter the **discount**.
 Had K-mart simply put a "clearance" sticker on the item the cashier
 would know what to do. By not clearly labelling the item there's no
 way the computerized scanning system can help, and it's not safe to
 rely on the diligence of the **checkout** person/cashier to note
 what is on special.

>The top reasons for being charged wrong as far as I can tell are:
>1/ The item was on "special" the week before and the employees did
>not remove the "special" or "sale" signs on the shelves, but
>the register rings up the regular price.

Oddly, I must say that the stores around me in NY/NJ are rather diligent about removing old signs. And most signs have the dates on them, to help the store staff as well as customers.

>2/ Item is on special, but something went wrong with the computer
>programming, so the special does not come through.

Some stores have a simple system for in-store/manager's specials: a little detachable tag with the price and barcode (such as store cooked chickens when they're getting old).

I no longer see the signs noting that you get an item free if it scans wrong. Stores were once boasting scanner accuracy. I wonder if that policy is still in effect.

>3/ Deceptive shelf or bin labeling. Item A is advertised for a low
>price with a large sign, but in the bin of item A's are also
>very similar item B at a higher price.

Agreed, I often lose 5+ minutes examining the items to match the ad or re-reading the sale sign and still cannot be 100% certain since I don't want to run to the front and try finding the price check scanner. At least toys-r-us has price check scanners around the store!

But I remember when Toys-r-us had inconsistent pricing on the Balto plush: some had bright red tags with the \$8 clearance price, others the regular tag of \$14. I wanted several at the \$8 price and, of course, the cashier is not empowered to enforce consistent pricing, so the manager was called over and had to look it up and take several MINUTES to get the correct pricing. I'm annoyed that selling most of those Balto plush requires such lengthy "exception handling" all due to inconsistent tagging.

>I'm also aggravated by the cumbersome procedure the two local
>grocery chains have for correcting an error. They have set up
>their electronic checkouts so the cashier can't make refunds.
>Even if I catch the error before leaving the register I will have
>to go to (and wait in line at) the combined customer service,
>bottle return and lottery counter for a **refund**.

Yup, the "Pathmark" chain in their effort to hire barely trained cashiers and enforce an accounting system to minimize theft (mostly fear of cashiers stealing or undercharging their friends), makes it a real hassle for a cashier to make ANY corrections or adjustments. They have to call over the manager to insert a key to allow the correction. The "ShopRite" chain has the cashier insert some "booboo log" into the printer to record EVERY error, slowing down the **checkout** process. It's as if the cashier and customer are both being punished for simple errors such as mis-scan or key-bounce (pressing the key enters 2 or more times instead of once so pressing 200 entered 2000).

>I take every chance to bring up my concerns about this with a store
>manager, but have seen no changes. Sometimes they are irritatingly

>arrogant about it (wasting my time to **complain** about a \$0.40 price
>error). In the case of error 2/ in the list above I have also
>often found that they don't care to correct it in the computer
>even after I **complain**. They just **refund** the complaining customers,
>and let the rest pay more.

I guess the state's attorney general never struck fear in them.

>Now you may say that a certain frequency of errors is unavoidable,
>and I just have to put up with this. I counter with that a lot
>of the errors are due store procedures, and could be avoided.

I agree and as you noted, the store's attitude stinks,
never apologizing for THEIR neglect or errors.

>a/ Number 1/ and 2/ above are caused by the stores' choice to have
>complicated pricing through frequent specials and sales.

Ah yes, the wonder of the marketeers and all the conditions they
place on the promotions (limited time, limited quantity,
tie-in where you need to buy other items, ...).

>b/ Number 3 also is by store choice to follow the advertising/marketing fad
>that things should be casually thrown together in bins instead
>of neatly ordered and sorted.

Agreed. There's someone strange happening in NJ where I see
stores that I thought reasonably arranged get new shelves and
reorganize everything, moving things around so wildly that I have to
re-learn the locations of many common items.

I guess some things may have outgrown their original areas
(gee, there were never so many hair products when we started the store...).

>(c/ This is not my main complaint, but for completeness 4/ of course
>would not occur if **checkout** clerks had some elementary education about
>what they are selling.)

That seems a luxury these days.

Previous CONSUMERS postings noted how computer stores have staff that give
incomprehensible advise, incorrect information or just no information.
Radio Shack always had high turnover of staff so no expertise
is ever retained.

Ah yes, I remember wasting about 20 minutes at a CompUSA looking for
CD-R blanks. Employees pointed me to various shelves only to
finally deduce that NONE were out on ANY shelves ANYWHERE in the store.
I guess this touches also on your argument for meaningful shelf
arrangement and store arrangement - knowing where something ought to be.

>Looking from the perspective of one customer it is easy to accept
>the customer services clerk's apology for the "mistake", but
>looking at the charge errors as a result, even if secondary, of
>marketing policies as argued on point a/ and b/ above, I think
>it is nothing less than stealing!

Fraud is the word.

Or at least misleading advertising

(ex: New Jersey's Newport Mall advertises 3% sales tax.

That's misleading since only SOME stores qualify for 3%, all others
are 6%. Apparently they were taken to task for that since new ads have
teeney fine print that the 3% is for qualified stores only,

but the billboard outside the Holland Tunnel was never corrected.
Also: the Newport Mall has the gall to CHARGE for car parking!
That's a hidden cost since there is no **discount** on that!
I know of only 1 other mall that charges for parking (Steamtown, PA)
but with validation the first few hours are FREE
so short trips have NO parking fees!)

>Am I right about this? What do you think? Are any legal actions
>one can take or at least threaten arrogant store managers with?

TV and newspaper reporters sometimes reveal such fraud
(such as selling outdated food or altering the expiry date).
Anything less than the state attorney general prosecuting for
fraud would be meaningless and ineffective.

>Frustrated in Rochester, NY
>Martin Jagersand email: jag@cs.rochester.edu

Frustrated all over NY and NJ

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Jeffrey Jonas
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